The Six-Box Organizational Model

Marvin Weisbord (1976, p. 431) developed one of the first organizational diagnostics,

which he described as “my efforts to combine bits of data, theories, research, and

hunches into a working tool that anyone can use.” In the context of our discussion of

implicit and explicit models, it is interesting to note that Weisbord subtitled his article,

“Six Places to Look for Trouble With or Without a Theory.” It is not surprising that his model is based on sets of factors or “boxes”:

1. Purposes: What business are we in?

2. Structure: How do we divide up the work?

3. Rewards: Do all tasks have incentives?

4. Helpful mechanisms: Have we adequate coordinating technologies?

5. Relationships: How do we manage conflict among people?

6. Leadership: Does someone keep the other five boxes in balance?

Weisbord (1976, p. 431) uses a radar screen analogy: “Just as air controllers use radar

to chart the course of an aircraft—height, speed, distance apart and weather—those seeking to improve an organization must observe relationships among the boxes and not focus on any particular blip.”

As a change diagnostic, therefore, this model has two main applications. First, in providing a small set of categories that simplify (perhaps oversimplify) the complexity of an organization, this facilitates the process of deciding which factors or sets of factors are generating problems, and which therefore require attention. Second, it reminds the change manager to consider the wider systemic implications of actions that address only one or two of those categories or boxes.